

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

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### ENGLAND

#### New Labour, New Schooling?

PHILIP GARNER

It is important to note that, in common with other parts of Europe, the United Kingdom's political shape has changed in recent years as a result of "devolution." In this, both Scotland and Wales now have their own statutory body—the Welsh National Assembly and the Scottish Parliament. These bodies have direct statutory control of education and social welfare, and a distinctive curricular and organizational arrangement for schools. Northern Ireland has had a similar arrangement for education over a longer period. For the sake of clarity, the present chapter focuses solely on the English system of schooling.

In an earlier commentary on the English education system (Garner, 2000), I suggested that the 1997 election of the first Labour government in nearly twenty years offered opportunities to tackle issues of long standing within education. Tony Blair's vision for New Labour was that it should have as its vanguard a progressive educational and social agenda. This was characterized by an emphasis on tackling deep-seated issues regarding social inclusion, educational failure, and access for all to a quality education service.

The climate of optimism that prevailed during those first years of the new administration forms a useful prologue to this chapter. It provides a baseline for measuring the extent to which the intentions of politicians—and the expectations of educationalists, welfare administrators, and activists, all of whom were swept up in an intense level of policy innovation—have subsequently been realized.

In the first term of New Labour's administration, pledges were made regarding education in its entirety. For the early years phase, a commitment was given to securing nursery

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places for all 4-year-olds; class sizes in primary schools would be reduced; and more spending on infrastructure, resources, and training would be forthcoming. Moreover, schools would see a continued devolution of financial resources from the center, enabling them to be far more proactive on local resource decisions in their schools. All of these actions have been underpinned by a signal commitment: reducing the impact of what has been an age-old tension in English education, namely, the sharp—and widening—gap between haves and have-nots, in respect to an individual's opportunity to access high-quality schooling. That gap in equality of opportunity has resulted in educational underachievement for significant numbers of the school-age population. Thus, in conclusion to that piece, I was given to remark that "The trial is beginning—the jury will remain out until beyond the millennium" (Garner, 2000, p. 111).

The new millennium is now well upon us and the present chapter provides an opportunity to return to court to continue the hearing. Whilst noting that this chapter is arranged into five sections, readers will quickly sense their mutual interdependence and overlap.

First, I will map the social fabric within which schools exist and function. From there, I will go on to identify some salient features of schooling in contemporary England. Next, the most positive aspects of current policies and schooling will be identified and elaborated upon. Immediately following will be an overview exploration of some of the key debates that are presently occurring. This section will allow for both an assessment of how well we have done and what still needs to be done. This final part of the chapter consists of concluding observations, providing a summary indication of the complexity and deep traditionalism that characterizes the provision of education in England.

## THE SOCIAL FABRIC

### Demographic

The population of England is approximately 48 million, with about 20 percent of this figure between the ages of 0 and 14. This population is mainly concentrated in urban or metropolitan settings, of which there are five major ones: Greater London and the Southeast, Greater Manchester, Birmingham and the West Midlands, the West Riding of Yorkshire, and the Tyne-Tees area in the Northeast. Much of these areas have undergone a period of rapid transition from industrial to service or commercial centers. What is equally clear—and an issue that has deep relevance for the provision of schooling—is that these urban spaces are characterized by diverse populations (racially, culturally, and economically) and include some of the most disadvantaged groups in the whole of the United Kingdom.

### Economic

England is best summarized as a capitalist economy, one of the four most successful in Europe. It has undergone a period of rapid transition following World War II, as heavy industry has been replaced by light engineering, manufacturing, and commercial and financial services. The latter accounts for by far the largest proportion of GDP. Agriculture

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is intensive, highly mechanized, and efficient. There are large coal, natural gas, and oil reserves. Primary energy production accounts for about 10 percent of GDP, one of the highest shares of any industrial nation. Importantly, in terms of national economic consequences, between 1980 and 1995 successive Tory governments greatly reduced public ownership and contained the growth of social welfare programs.

As a member state of the European Union (EU), England participates in Europe-wide decision making via the European parliament in Brussels. However, it is not a participant in the Europe-wide common currency, the euro. Successive governments have deferred decisions on involvement in this, preferring instead to retain £ sterling as the unit of currency. Many of the urban and rural areas affected by changes in the profile of the English economy have been recipients of incoming EU investment. Rapid globalization has also meant investment and economic partnerships with other nations, including the United States, Japan, and emerging markets in Latin America and the former Soviet states.

### Political

England is administered by a democratically elected Parliament, which comprises a House of Commons and a House of Lords. The 'Commons,' constituted of about 650 members who are elected by popular vote for five years, is the most important decision-making body. The Lords has, until recently, been occupied by 'hereditary peers.' The 'Lords' is gradually being reformed to ensure that its membership more accurately reflects English society: hitherto, it has mainly been populated by the English 'landed' classes, whose titles are hereditary. There are three principal political parties in England: the Conservative and Unionist party (Tory), the Labour party (referred to now as 'New Labour'), and the Liberal-Democrat party. The former two have separately formed every government for the last sixty years.

Local government is provided by a system of regional councils and local authorities, each comprising locally elected members. These are responsible for the direct provision and monitoring of education, welfare, health, and environment. Central government retains control over generic policy matters, including financial provision, for these services, although there has been a degree of devolution during the last decade. This is especially important in respect of schooling, where local authority controls have been sharply reduced following the Education Act of 1988.

### Cultural

As with other postcolonial countries, the cultural map of England is changing rapidly. Historical divisions in society (typically referred to as the English 'class system') have increasingly become blurred, and it is now less common to refer to 'working,' 'middle,' and 'upper' classes. Nevertheless, there remains an important residue of influence from this.

One issue of importance is the net effect of a widening gap in 'social capital' within regions, and even in individual towns and cities. Thus, in spite of the economic prosperity of many, there remain large groups of people who have far less access to good housing, public transport, and recreational amenities. This is reflected in the type of schooling that often characterizes such locations. It is noteworthy, for instance, that the Child Poverty

Action Group (CPAG) has indicated that over a quarter of children in the UK are living at or below the poverty line (Flaherty, Veit-Wilson, & Dorman, 2004). Moreover, there is also something of a cultural divide between 'north' and 'south,' with significant opportunities across the human services being more accessible in the economically prosperous and influential southeast of England.

The ethnic composition of England has changed radically since 1945, and it continues to do so. Historical factors relating to England's colonial past have established the basis for a richly multicultural society. It is now estimated that well over 5 percent of the English population comprises people from so-called minority ethnic groupings. This brings with it tensions of its own, with issues of job discrimination and lack of representation of ethnic minorities in executive roles in business, the commercial sector, the public services, and government.

The spatial location of minority groups also raises important questions regarding the cultural coherence of England. About two-thirds of the minority population lives in metropolitan areas, and often in sectors of towns and cities that are viewed as less favourable for the reasons described above. Very few minority groups live in prosperous, semirural, or rural locations.

### Religious

The official religion of England is Christian Protestant, or Church of England. Substantial sections of the population are Roman Catholic, with Methodist, Baptist, and, increasingly, other 'world' religions becoming numerically important. In common with other postindustrialized countries, there has been a rise in interest in new, alternative religions and groups. The rapid growth of ethnic groups has been accompanied by high levels of religious observance among Hindi, Islamic, and Sikh populations. On the other hand, a notable feature of the religious map of England is a gradual overall decline in church attendance in the last thirty or so years. Commensurately, secular morality has increased in significance. However, although it is the case that religion in general is far less important than hitherto, organized religion—especially Church of England and Roman Catholic—remains a significant stakeholder in schooling.

As with other postindustrialized nations, each of the social parameters described above impacts variously on the lives of the English population. New Labour came to office with England's economy in good health. Much of what they had inherited from the preceding four Tory administrations has been sustained into the twenty-first century. This represents a relative triumph over the negative effects of postindustrialism and postcolonialism, during which England's trading influence and industrial performance had declined considerably.

But English society, and its manifestation in education, is becoming more complex. The twin dilemmas of readjusting to an expanded role within Europe whilst redefining a world role in politics, commerce, and culture have resulted, during New Labour's period of office, in a ceaseless tide of new initiatives. Education policy and resulting provision has been the product of this emerging situation. Oppositional stances on virtually all aspects of policy and provision are commonplace.

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## SCHOOLING IN ENGLAND

The English system provides compulsory education from 4 to 16 years of age in the nursery, primary, and secondary age ranges. There are about 26,000 schools in England, catering to approximately 11 million pupils aged between 3 years and 18 years. In this section of the chapter I will map some of the key characteristics of schooling. This forms the canvas upon which significant and widespread changes in policy and provision are taking place. Indeed, the years that have coincided with the rise to power of the New Labour governments since 1997 have seen the rate of change increase dramatically. But, in order to understand the importance of these changes, it is necessary to give some background to the system of education that they are intended to refine. Docking (2002), Mackinnon and Statham (2000), and Gearon (2002) provide a more detailed review.

### Organization and Governance of Schooling

Education in England is jointly administered by Local Education Authorities (LEAs, or what might be called 'school boards' in some countries) and by central government, via the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). LEAs represent the means by which local governance of schools is effected. There are 109 of these. This number includes 36 metropolitan boroughs and 33 Greater London boroughs. LEAs are an integral part of local government and administer education services on behalf of elected local education committees. Their specific responsibilities are for the employment and payment of teaching and non-teaching staff, the building and maintenance of schools, transportation, recreation, and provision of support services for pupils—including those who have learning difficulties or disabilities.

On a national level, the DfES is the government department responsible for education in England. It sets out the policy and broad framework for schooling, it introduces and disseminates legislation on education based on decisions of the government of the day, and it fulfills an inspectorial function. The latter is mainly carried out by the Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED).

The changes introduced into the English system as a result of the 1988 Education Act (brought in under the Tories) have impacted deeply on the way in which schools are organized and governed. That Act meant that the previously considerable powers of the LEA were diminished, and the schools themselves assumed far greater self-control. Nowhere has this been more apparent than in the respect of financial matters. Schools gained direct control over their budgets and were henceforward able to make choices about staffing matters. Some schools even chose to remove themselves from even minimal LEA control by becoming 'grant-maintained' schools (GMS), a term that was changed in 2000 to become 'foundation schools.' (Foundation schools are state schools that have a governing body that directly employs school staff and determines admission policies. As well, the school land and buildings are owned by that governing body, or by a charitable foundation.)

The governance of schooling has been in a process of virtually continuous change for the last twenty-five years, with significant alterations to the way in which schooling has been organized. Thus, the role of the LEA remains an area of acute political conflict.

### Legislation, Guiding Philosophies, and Policies

The 1944 Education Act envisaged a 'balanced partnership' between central and local government in the provision of educational services (Meredith, 2002). More recent legislation threatened this relationship. The Education Act (1988) significantly reduced local powers: The Tory government of the day saw LEAs as financially reckless in their spending. Subsequently, the New Labour administrations of the 1990s and early twenty-first century have redressed this. Thus, the 1998 School Standards and Framework Act saw LEAs obtain control of a crucial aspect of education: the role of promoting standards. Nevertheless, schools themselves have retained a key self-governing role, so that the net impact of legislation has been to secure an uneasy equilibrium in the relationships between schools, local authorities, and central government.

The last Tory government summarized its policy on education by reference to 'five great themes'—quality, diversity, parental choice, greater autonomy for schools, and greater accountability (DfE, 1992). *Quality* was being secured as a result of the introduction of a standardized national curriculum, which brought with it an entitlement of all 5- to 16-year-olds to a broad and balanced range of subjects. Quality of provision was monitored by the Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED). *Diversity* was introduced by the advent of the grant-maintained schools, which are free from local authority control. Moreover, subsequent to the 1988 Education Act, schools secured the *autonomy* to select new entrants, while *parental choice* of the school their child may attend was freed from long-standing controls. New arrangements were also identified for pupils who experienced learning difficulties. All of this was also envisaged in support of greater diversity. But there was also to be far greater *accountability* via both regular school inspections and by the publication of official 'league tables' of school performance.

New Labour's policies, on their election in 1997, incorporated much of the positive rhetoric of the five themes. The first set of targets have, in the government's terms, largely been reached. Thus, no children between 5 and 7 years of age will be in classes of more than thirty. Two-thirds of 3-year-olds will have nursery places. Pupil performance, measured by Standard Attainment Tests (SATs), will be improved at both the primary and secondary level. Moreover, truancy from school would be reduced, as would the level of pupil exclusion.

Late in 2004 the government introduced a new *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners* (DfES, 2004a). This document comprised an overview of the five key principles that government saw as underpinning its policy agenda. These are:

- Greater personalization and choice, with the needs of learners 'at center stage'
- Opening up services to new and different providers
- Freedom and independence for head teachers and 'front-line' teachers, and more streamlined funding arrangements
- Commitment to staff development
- Emphasis on partnerships with parents, employers, volunteers

But there is one overriding theme that has remained as the *leitmotiv* for New Labour policies throughout their tenure in office: that of breaking the link between social class and

educational achievement. As the Five Year Strategy notes, "No society can afford to waste the talent of its children and citizens. So major challenges at each key phase of life remain" (DfES, 2004a). In the early years, therefore, greater flexibility in childcare will result in closer collaboration between education, health, and social care services. The development of 'dawn-to-dusk' schools would be a central component of policy, while greater financial and social support is to be provided to those parents who wished to stay at home with their children instead of working.

In primary schools an even greater emphasis on reading, writing, and math is foreseen, while the curriculum is to be widened. Every child will be able to learn a foreign language, play music, and participate in competitive sport. Schools will be encouraged to form supportive clusters or networks, whilst closer involvement with parents and caregivers is to be encouraged.

Secondary education would see pupils being given greater independence in their learning, and the curriculum choices available are to be made wider and more flexible. A new type of school, called 'independent specialist school,' would take the place of comprehensive schools. At the same time, the Strategy confirms that "we will never return to a system based on selection of the few and rejection of many" (DfES, 2004a). Each secondary school would be in receipt of a guaranteed budget for three years, linked to pupil numbers. Each school would also have the freedom to own its own land and buildings, and every school in the country would be systematically refurbished over fifteen years.

Perhaps the most important piece of legislation concerning schools, and one that impacts across all age ranges and school types, is the Children Bill (2004). This adventurous piece of legislation proposes to connect services for all children, thereby ensuring what the New Labour administration has referred to as "an ambitious plan for education, skills, and children's services" (DfES, 2004b).

### Curricula

The introduction of a 'national curriculum' (NC) in 1988 marked the beginning of an era of close scrutiny of what is taught in English schools. Hitherto, it was very much the case that LEAs, and individual schools, decided on the precise content of each curriculum area. Whilst originally viewed with great suspicion by many education professionals, the NC has now become a substantive aspect of the education system. Its success in winning the hearts and minds of teachers was largely due to the fact that the original, very rigid format was replaced in 1993 by a more flexible approach. This, and subsequent amendments, meant that teachers secured greater flexibility, whilst still providing a curriculum that was broad, balanced, and relevant.

To date, the key changes to the national curriculum have been directed toward an even greater emphasis on literacy and numeracy, the strengthening of coverage of creative subjects (including art, drama, and music), and the introduction of new curricula for 'citizenship' and personal, social, and health education.

Subsequently, the New Labour administration has introduced a raft of new curriculum strategies. These have had the principal aim of raising the level of achievement at a time when evidence from international comparative studies (see, for example, Brooks et al., 1996, and Keys, 1996) suggested that England still lagged behind its competitors in the

global 'education market.' As a response, the Labour administration embarked on three core strategies, dealing in turn with literacy (1998), numeracy (1999), and information and communication technology (1999). All three strategies are ongoing, remaining in place during the third term of New Labour administration. And, they continue to be surrounded by debates about the efficacy of centrally driven curricula (Tymms, 2004; Wyse, 2003).

Elsewhere, considerable confusion surrounds the tension at secondary level between curricula designed to meet the vocational needs of an increasingly technocratic society and the demands of curriculum traditionalists, who claim that such a focus marks a worrying dissipation in the quality of knowledge. The Report of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform has the potential to lead to a radical change to the structure and content of this phase of education in England. The next ten years is likely to see significant alterations in well-established assessment and curriculum arrangements in schools and colleges in this age phase.

### Pedagogical Theory and Practice

The last twenty-five or so years have seen an increasing move toward a more balanced pedagogical approach than was previously apparent. Thus, the 1960s and 1970s were characterized by tension between professional allegiance to either so-called 'progressive' pedagogy, wherein all children, irrespective of achievement level, were educated in the same class, or to an approach based on rigid streaming based on ability. The current emphasis is upon 'differentiated pedagogy' (Burton, 2004), a process by which teachers attempt, by utilizing a variety of approaches, to enable each pupil to achieve intended learning targets. As such, the strategy is highly suited to classrooms that, increasingly during the 1990s, have become more complex on account of the diversity of learners within them.

Such an eclectic approach is also commensurate with New Labour's commitment to social justice by promoting wider access and participation in education. Nevertheless, this is a contested approach, with many schools selecting teaching groups according entirely to capability, with all of the consequences for balance and breadth of content (Ireson & Halam, 2001).

### Evaluation

Evaluation of school performance in England remains largely in the hands of OfSTED. This, as has been noted, is the statutory body responsible for standards in schools. Inspections are conducted by teams of independent inspectors, headed by a registered inspector. Teams are required to include at least one lay inspector who has no professional background in education. Each school in England now has an inspection approximately every four years. School inspection reports are public and provide information regarding the quality of education provided; the standards achieved; and the spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development of pupils—including their behavior.

Schools whose performance is deemed below a required standard are termed 'failing' schools and can be placed on a program of 'special measures' designed to remediate shortcomings. OfSTED now has the additional responsibility for inspecting local education authorities. The ongoing preoccupation with assessment of educational performance (whether

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ndard are termed 'failing' signed to remediate short- ecting local education au- nal performance (whether

of schools, teachers, or individual pupils) is directly linked to fears that England might be losing out in the competitive global marketplace.

### Teacher Training

There has always been considerable scrutiny of the way that teachers are trained in England; such is the importance afforded to the role (DfEE, 1997). Until relatively recently there was a great deal of negativity directed toward the way that teachers are trained, it being implicated in such things as discipline problems and declining academic standards (Lawlor, 1990).

Subsequently, and coinciding with the election of New Labour in 1997, a new era of positive relations was forged, in which the 'profession' of teacher training entered a period characterized by trust. Prior to this, OfSTED conducted regular, systematic inspections of teacher training providers, and some of its findings—which were often challenged—had fueled the Tory quest to reform the sector (OfSTED, 1993). The Teacher Training Agency was established in 1994, and under New Labour it has become both the key regulating body for the sector as well as the focus for professional debate on a set of 'national standards' for the award of qualified teacher status (QTS). In these discussions it was a widespread view that the advent of 'lifelong learning,' information technology, and new curricular initiatives required a 'new professionalism.'

As a result of the emerging national standards for QTS (TTA, 2002) and the TTA's own corporate intention of making "teaching an evidence- and research-based profession" (TTA, 1997), the status of the teacher training community has been enhanced. Not only is it closer to the practical needs of trainees (by such nationally recognized initiatives as school-based training), but it has been able to secure a more respected position within university education itself via involvement in a variety of national research projects.

## SUCCESSSES

The last fifteen years have seen some significant positive outcomes for children and young people. This has in large part been a product of the education policies pursued by successive Tory, but mainly New Labour, administrations. In this subsection I will identify six areas that are indicative of this widespread success: the national curriculum, early years education, special education needs and inclusion, children's services, the professional status of teachers, and the focus on emotional health and positive behavior.

### The National Curriculum

A national curriculum was introduced by the Tory government in 1988. Originally, it comprised a set of highly detailed and prescriptive requirements. This emerged as a result of a desire by politicians to make schools more accountable. As early as 1985 the DES issued *Better Schools*, which reflected a drive toward raising standards of attainment, securing breadth and balance across curriculum subjects, and making such activities relevant yet

differentiated (DES, 1985). Its further origins can be found in a document by Her Majesty's Inspectors, which articulated the view that "A school's curriculum consists of all those activities designed or encouraged within its organisational framework to promote the intellectual, personal, social and physical development of its pupils" (HMI, 1988).

Despite tensions regarding the way in which the national curriculum was to be evaluated—via SATs—it is nonetheless the first time in English education that measurement of children's school performance from ages 5 through 16 was attempted. It was also viewed by many professionals, particularly those working with children with special educational needs (SEN), as a vehicle for equal opportunity. SEN pupils were seen as one of the key groups to benefit from the innovation (Stakes & Hornby, 1996). Moreover, the national curriculum placed great emphasis on continuity and progression in learning. This was accompanied by a focus upon differentiated pedagogy, which was viewed as the means by which wide-ranging learner needs could be accommodated, either within a single classroom or by grouping according to ability.

Nor has the national curriculum remained static in its original format—another significant positive feature of the initiative. In response to criticism that it was too prescriptive and heavily reliant upon bureaucracy (Basini, 1996), the NC was revised in 1995, following a period of significant consultation with teachers. Moreover, a moratorium limiting further change until 2000 was agreed upon (Docking, 2002). Even more recently, New Labour has reemphasised a commitment to 'the three Rs' (maths, reading, and writing) through a series of national strategies. At the same time, schools have been given greater freedom in what to teach outside the agreed core subjects (maths, English, science, and information technology). They were able to undertake initiatives that responded to the social, emotional and (broadly) 'citizenship' needs of children and young people (DfEE/QCA, 1999).

The process of refinement is still continuing, but the major success of the national curriculum, in providing all children with access to a 'broad, balanced, differentiated, and relevant' school experience, remains. Moreover, it has become an integral element of the professional orientation of teachers.

### Early Years Education

Educational provision in England has seen dramatic changes in the field of early years education. New Labour's Early Years Policy relates not just to preschool initiatives—those that ensure that young children are socially and emotionally equipped to enter mainstream schooling. Rather, government has seen its policy in terms of a 'wrap-round,' integrated service of child welfare from 0 to 5 years. Much of its success in pursuing a change agenda in this aspect of education has been linked to New Labour's desire to ensure that the various early years initiatives are rooted at the local level in Early Years Development and Care Partnerships (EYDCPs).

A number of national initiatives, operationalized locally, are indicative of New Labour's commitment to "bring together the maintained, private and voluntary sectors in the spirit of co-operation and genuine partnership, based on existing good practice" (DfEE, 2001). 'Sure Start' and 'Early Excellence Centres' were aimed at securing integrated provision in areas of social need. These have been instrumental in tackling social exclusion,

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supporting families in raising children, promoting early child development, and ensuring that more children in disadvantaged settings are better equipped to begin compulsory schooling.

New initiatives in curriculum, training, and inspection supported these arrangements. A 'foundation curriculum' was developed (QCA, 1998), which is in the process of refinement. Staff training came under scrutiny, too. Previously, there was a tremendous variety in qualifications, but with the development of national vocational qualifications and the emergence of dedicated Early Years teacher training courses, a set of nationally recognized standards has been developed. Finally, the regulation of early years provision, via OfSTED inspection, has been characterized by an integrated approach, based on rigor, evidence, and respect for professionalism.

Recent initiatives, especially the *Every Child Matters* agenda (see elsewhere in this chapter) raises many questions for future Early Years policy in England. One deep-seated source of discussion has been the explanation for differential achievement levels on a European canvas. Some commentators (for example, Mills & Mills, 1998) argue that discrepancies in performance are the result of distinct preschool approaches in (for example) Switzerland, Hungary, and Belgium. Children from these countries outperform English pupils in high school in their later years.

### Special Educational Needs and Inclusion

The landscape of special educational needs has been changed irrevocably as a result of policy initiatives in the last twenty years. The move away from a deficit model, via a phase where 'integration' was the vogue, through to 'inclusive practice' has been a notable success feature of government initiatives (Clough & Garner, 2003). In the latter, children and young people who experience learning difficulties are viewed as having important, undeniable rights (Knight, 1999). Such moves are consistent with global reorientations regarding the rights of all learners to access mainstream schools. These changes in policy and practice in the area of SEN have a number of constituent features, each of which hallmarks current policy as being successful.

First, a more effective, people-centered, and standardized approach to identification and assessment has been enshrined in a revised *Code of Practice* (DfES, 2001). This also sets out the organizational protocols through which SEN is dealt with. The statutory guidance it contains has done much to ensure greater equity in resourcing SEN and has also led to a dramatic raising of the status of SEN within mainstream schools. The document, for instance, establishes that all teachers have responsibility for promoting inclusion, whilst at the same time requiring that all schools have a 'Special Needs Coordinator.' The burgeoning importance of SEN has also been recognized by the fact that it is now a formal element of inspection of schools by OfSTED.

Greater involvement of parents and children, as identified by the *Code of Practice*, has also been a successful feature of policy approaches in the last few years. In this respect, they have strengthened the emphasis on parent/pupil participation highlighted in the much earlier Warnock Report (DES, 1978). Furthermore, 'parent partnership' schemes have been established in all local authorities in England, as well as the framework for arbitration and conciliation when disputes arise regarding provision for SEN.

New Labour has recently introduced a second action plan for SEN and inclusion. Entitled *Removing Barriers to Achievement* (DfES, 2004c), this sets out policy and practice imperatives for the next few years. The plan comprises actions in four key areas: early interventions, removing barriers to learning, raising expectations and achievement, and delivering improvements in partnership—all of which have been flagged at various points in this chapter.

The net effect of these policy initiatives has ensured that educational provision for children and young people who experience learning difficulties remains at the very heart of the legislative agenda. This marks a dramatic change from its marginal position a little over twenty-five years ago.

### Children's Services

A concurrent success is apparent in the integration of 'services for children.' The Warnock Report (DES, 1978) recommended much closer collaboration between the various agencies involved in promoting the health, education, and social welfare of children. But progress in providing joined-up operations had, until recently, been slow (Roaf, 2002).

The New Labour government has attempted, with some success, to address the fragmentation of associated children's services. The current *Every Child Matters* agenda is at the very heart of this initiative. *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* (DfES, 2004b) is a shared program of change to improve outcomes for all children and young people. It takes forward the Government's vision of radical reform for children, young people, and families. It is premised on five outcomes which are regarded as key to well-being in childhood and later life: being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution, and achieving economic well-being.

This is a wide and challenging program of change, resting on a new *Children Act* (2004). It encompasses diverse elements and enables schools to offer pupils learning that is individualized to meet their needs, as well as children and health services providing young people with increasingly *individualized* care. In a word, government has recognized that better outcomes for children depend on the integration of universal services with targeted and more specialized help and on bringing services together around the needs of the child and family.

### Professional Status of Teachers

The Teacher Training Agency (TTA) in England has been at the heart of a concentrated campaign to improve the standing of teachers in the eyes of society. For some time, during the 1980s and early 1990s, teachers had been the source of much negative attention. As a professional body, they were viewed suspiciously by Tory governments who saw them as resistant to change and liberal in persuasion. Above all, teachers were implicated as being responsible for the so-called *declining standards* of achievement in schools (HMI, 1980). Yet, at the same time, teachers were increasingly being seen as the key to 'effective schools,' as defined in terms of *academic performance* (Hextall & Mahony, 1998; TTA, 1997).

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The gradually improving public and professional profile of teachers is the product of a number of strategic initiatives. There is now a 'national standard' for the certification of teachers (TTA, 2002). Also, by employing a systematic process of induction, the profession has been restructured to provide financial reward to more experienced and skilled teachers who remain in the classroom. Furthermore, and importantly, the concept of 'teacher as researcher' has become core to current activity (TTA, 1997).

In addition, government has promoted the establishment of a General Teaching Council to inform policy and regulate aspects of professional conduct. It is viewed by government as a means by which teachers have a "clear professional voice, independent of government but working with us to raise standards" (DfEE, 2001).

### Focus on Emotional Health and Positive Behavior

A raft of initiatives over the last three years have addressed issues of disengagement by pupils that result in behavior and attendance problems in schools. Teachers have been encouraged to recognize the importance of social, emotional, and behavioral skills (SEBS) as a core element in promoting behavior for learning. Weare and Gray (2003) have identified a range of benefits of this approach, including greater educational and work success, improvements in behavior, increased inclusion, and improvements to mental health.

Moreover, the Healthy Schools project (Department of Health, 2004) stressed that where pupils have good emotional, social, and behavioral skills, they will be able to be effective and successful learners, make and sustain friendships, and deal with and resolve conflict effectively and fairly. The notion that 'emotional intelligence' (Goleman, 1995) is a crucial element in schooling success has now become firmly embedded at policy level.

Central to this initiative is a greater involvement of children and young people in their own education. Such an approach fits comfortably with recent United Nations mandates on the rights of children. In spite of this, there remains a significant body of opinion that claims that schools allow children too great a say in what happens to them in education. Such hard-line, reactionary views will hopefully become less influential with the appointment by New Labour of a very first Minister for Children.

## KEY DEBATES AND CHALLENGES

It is important to appreciate that any of the above six themes identified as points of 'success' and 'progress' within the English educational system in the previous section can also be viewed as contentious. This is because there are radically different versions of what comprises an appropriate and responsive education system for the twenty-first century. Added may be other issues of current and ongoing concern. Debate about educational policy and provision is frequently polarized and politicized; it has become a salient feature of the social discourse of the country.

I will now briefly comment on five indicative aspects of the educational debate in England—curriculum, governance, pupil behavior, educational and social inclusion, and personal and social education—in the expectation that readers will define possible links to existent tensions in other countries.

### Curriculum Issues

In English state schools (i.e., those at which attendance is free and compulsory between the ages of 5 and 16 years) teachers have enthusiastically engaged with the need to provide a curriculum that is "broad, balanced, relevant and differentiated" (DES, 1985). But the imposition of a 'national' curriculum brought considerable disquiet from some teachers. While the NC has been viewed as a means of ensuring access for all children to a common curriculum, it has also meant that opportunities for curriculum innovation have diminished. Principal among pupils negatively affected by this have been those who experience special educational needs (Stakes & Hornby, 1996). At the heart of the concerns was a perceived preoccupation with testing. SATs are an integral part of NC provision, yet the limitations of the assessment format have undoubtedly diminished its positive impact and arguably have been implicit in marginalizing many pupils (Clough & Garner, 2003). Moreover, SATs have continued to be used as the chief means of identifying 'good' or 'failing' schools. As a result, some schools are less likely to want to offer places to pupils who are underperforming academically. This is especially so as SAT scores are routinely used as a means of teacher appraisal and performance management (Bartlett & Burton, 2003), as has been noted elsewhere in this chapter. The challenge facing educators will be to secure curriculum flexibility while identifying credible, but alternative, means of assessment.

The NC provides the clearest example of government's intention to control the delivery of education from the center (Avis, 1999). New Labour's education policy is best summarized by the so-called 'Third Way,' which combines neo-liberalism with state-centered socialism. Some observers have viewed this approach as a means of securing the support of the influential middle classes whilst retaining a firm grip on expenditures (Phillips, 2001). Current policy initiatives, in both primary and secondary education, demonstrate the extent to which uniformity is being acquired (for instance, the national strategies for behavior and attendance—see elsewhere in this chapter).

Such rigid control from the center brings abundant criticism. Some have argued that the net beneficiaries of the approach are those whose ideology is driven by the threefold emphasis on cost-effectiveness, efficiency, and competition. Far less obvious are the positive impacts of such centralized initiatives on individual children in school. Once more, there are suggestions that it is the pupil who experiences learning difficulty who is most adversely affected.

### Governance Issues

One of the most challenging outcomes of the Education Act of 1988 is the notable decline in the power vested in LEAs. Most funding for schools now moves straight from central government directly into schools, bypassing local government. Schools are funded according to their size. Although this has undoubtedly brought the benefit of greater autonomy regarding where the money is spent, it has resulted in sharp differences in the capacity of schools to attract more qualified or experienced teachers and/or to provide an extended set of resources and facilities. Given that parents often make choices of school placement based on these issues, the situation is tailor-made for the 'rich' schools to get richer.

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### Pupil Behavior Issues

In 2005, OfSTED produced a report on 'challenging behavior' in schools. In spite of there being a stated large majority of schools characterized by good standards of pupil behavior, the national press chose to focus upon a reference made by school inspectors to a perceived rise in 'gang cultures.' The overall sample on which sensationalist headlines were made was minute (only three schools were viewed in negative terms). And yet, such is the level of public and professional concern about behavior in schools that calls were made for a more punitive approach to pupils who misbehave.

Major national strategies focussing on behavior, attendance, and bullying have been in place for a number of years (DfES, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d). These are now being questioned in terms of their appropriateness, given the OfSTED findings (however tenuous their evidence base). Both New Labour and the Conservatives are planning to introduce more 'pupil referral units,' there are further signals that parents of pupils who behave badly will be held more accountable, and schools will be given greater powers to exclude pupils.

### Educational and Social Inclusion Issues

All of these measures sit uncomfortably alongside notions of social and educational inclusion (Thomas & Loxley, 2001), and some commentators suggest that, in any case, such measures are little more than sticking plaster (O'Brien & Blamires, 2001). They serve only to deflect policy away from deeper causal factors that underlie pupil behavior—some of which have been referred to in this chapter. Others maintain that pupils who prevent others from learning ought not to be included in mainstream classes. Certainly, the popular media are frequently used as a means of publicizing the inherent contradictions within inclusion and infer claims of political correctness in distributing educational opportunity and resources.

### Personal and Social Education Issues

The dramatic focus upon a formal, centrally determined national curriculum in England has undermined consideration of the affective element in education. Because the national curriculum comprises distinct sets of subject knowledge that is periodically assessed through SATs, teachers, parents, and pupils themselves receive both explicit and subliminal messages that these constitute most of what is important in education. Teachers are now trained mainly to 'deliver' subject knowledge—and they receive their licence to teach based predominantly upon their capacity to do so. Training providers echo this requirement in their courses.

The net result is that relatively little attention is paid to such aspects of education as emotional development, pastoral care and guidance, citizenship, and so on. Because such areas (referred to as the 'hidden' curriculum of schooling) are not formally assessed, there is less incentive for schools, teachers, or pupils to view them as important. Some argue that this state of affairs is potentially damaging—not least to the development of social cohesion and the nation-state. Thus, the English Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA)

suggests that attention to such affective aspects of education results in pupils having "an entitlement in schools that will empower them to participate in society effectively as active, informed and critical and responsible citizens" (QCA, 1998, p. 9). This represents a significant challenge to government and community alike—precisely during a period in which English society and its institutions are becoming more diverse.

## CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

It is scarcely possible, within this brief chapter, to provide a comprehensive view of the changing face of the English education system—such is its complexity and ongoing nature. It may, however, be worth observing that, like other parts of the world, England has witnessed the ever-increasing effects of globalization (Coulby & Jones, 1995; Cogburn, 1998). This has been apparent in its economic, social, political, and cultural formats. But nowhere has it been more evidenced than in the education service.

Global competitiveness has resulted in deep scrutiny of standards of compulsory education in England and a committed drive to connect educational procedures with the demands of the global marketplace. It has had a corresponding impact on the curriculum, the teaching profession, and on reshaping the financing and governance of education (Coulby & Zambeta, 2005). Given that this is the case, it is unsurprising that the last decade has seen dramatic shifts in educational policy and provision. In each of the areas noted, together with others that have been omitted because of space limitations, further not insignificant developments can be expected (DfES, 2004a). To conclude by extending my original legal metaphor, there may need to be a retrial.

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# SCHOOLING AROUND THE WORLD

**Debates, Challenges, and Practices**

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